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ABSTRACT

Ten recommendations on outcomes assessment primarily for undergraduate education are offered by the Program and Institutional Assessment Task Force of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). The recommendations include: degree-granting institutions should assess entering students to determine whether they are prepared to take courses toward a degree or whether they require basic skills remediation; states should develop uniform definitions of graduation and retention rates and should measure them at each institution; degree-granting institutions should assess the achievement of general education objectives by undergraduates; the performance of students on licensure and certification examinations should be used as an appropriate measure for judging program and institutional quality; and occupational programs should be judged in part by the success of students in finding employment. Appended are: a section from a report entitled "Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education" that covers assessment; and an article on an Education Commission of the States survey on current practices in assessment in public higher education entitled "Assessment and Outcomes Measurement: A View from the States" by Carol M. Boyer and others. (SW)

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A STATEMENT OF POLICY BY THE STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ON PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

July 14, 1987

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STATEMENT OF POLICY BY
THE STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS
ON PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) established a task force to respond to and enlarge upon the findings on college quality published in August 1986 by the National Governors Association in the document Time For Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education. This section of the governors' report (see Attachment 1) stressed four points on assessment:

(1) Each college and university should implement systematic programs that use multiple measures to assess undergraduate student learning.

(2) The information gained from assessment should be used to evaluate institutional and program quality and should be made available to the public.

(3) States should adjust funding formulas for public colleges and universities to provide incentives for improving undergraduate learning, based upon the results of comprehensive assessment programs.

(4) Demonstrated levels of student learning and performance should be a consideration in granting institutional accreditation.

The statement of policy that follows reflects the work of the task force and the adoption of its report by the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

The State Higher Education Executive Officers commend the leadership provided by the nation's governors in focusing attention on the quality of undergraduate programs and their assessment. We endorse the recommendations and seek in this report to elaborate upon them.

We are especially pleased to note that the NGA report calls for multiple assessment measures. This, we believe, requires both quantitative and qualitative reviews of programs, including peer review. In looking beyond quantifiable outcomes assessment, we want to reinforce the long-standing tradition in higher education of evaluating the process as well as the product. This qualitative component of assessment avoids the public's overlooking important factors in education, such as faculty preparation, that are difficult to measure with certainty by purely numerical means. It also avoids the skewing of resources toward easily quantifiable activities.

To set the stage for our recommendations and suggestions, we want to refer the reader to the current practices in assessment in public higher education, as described in a recent survey by the Education Commission of the States (see Attachment 2). The survey reveals levels and modes of assessment differing widely among states, but increasing significantly in almost all states in the last several years. In fact, some states have already implemented a number of the recommendations in this report. A particular area of growth is demonstration projects on individual campuses that will be used to build statewide assessment programs. This represents a healthy environment for the task at hand.

We see the role of statewide assessment in relation to assessment at each campus as the upper part of a pyramid. There are certain common aims of higher education (and we specify these later) that should be subject to statewide assessment, but, in no way should these exhaust the assessment undertaken at each campus. Instead, most assessment should be designed by and tailored to the individual institution with the active involvement of faculty in both planning and implementation. Statewide assessment should itself be guided by careful consultation with all public campuses and their faculty in a given state. Different governance structures for higher education among the states will dictate different roles in assessment for campuses, operating boards and statewide coordinating bodies. As will also become clear in the discussion that follows, we use the term "assessment" in the context of both programs and individual students. While this usage differs from the technical standard that reserves "evaluation" for programs, we want not only to be understood by the public, but also to stress the importance of both kinds of assessment.

Recommendation 1. Each degree-granting institution should assess entering students to determine whether they are prepared to take courses toward a degree or whether they require remediation of deficiencies in basic skills before undertaking such courses.

Comment: This recommendation requires a judgment of what constitutes the appropriate level of instruction to justify degree credit. It also presumes the existence of remedial course work, where warranted, to remove deficiencies in basic skills (arithmetic and understanding and composition of the written word) and a basis by which to confirm that deficiencies have been removed. Deficiencies in study skills may also require remediation. Individual states should decide how uniformly the recommended assessment and the corresponding definition of credit-bearing instruction and means of remediation should be applied. Individual states should also take into account assessments of college preparation made statewide by high schools prior to students' graduation.

We believe that assessment for placement, as recommended here, is vital to quality and access in higher education and urge states to support this activity as a regular obligation of colleges and universities. While K-12 initiatives may eventually reduce the need for remediation at the college level, this need is not likely to abate quickly.

Recommendation 2. States should develop uniform definitions of graduation and retention rates and should measure them at each college and university. Studies should be undertaken to suggest strategies for improving these rates, especially for minority students.

Comment: We recognize that an urban, commuter university would not be expected to graduate as large a percentage of its full-time entering freshmen within, say, six years as would a rural, residential university because of the greater percentage of transient students at the former institution. We also recognize that graduation and retention rates should not be stressed to the point that grade inflation is encouraged. Nonetheless, we believe that graduation and retention rates within appropriate categories of institutions deserve careful attention as one set of measures of institutional effectiveness. This belief relies on repeated accounts, the lack of consistent data notwithstanding, of poor graduation rates for those who enter full-time. We cannot ignore this picture of unfulfilled potential.

Recommendation 3. Each degree-granting institution should assess the achievement of general education objectives by undergraduate students.

Comment: This recommendation will require institutions to define their general education objectives. While these objectives may differ from institution to institution, this recommendation could not be fulfilled at any campus solely by a basic skills test. While a test of general education may reasonably include items on basic skills, it should assess students' critical thinking and may also assess other general education outcomes, such as cultural awareness. Assessment of general education should not necessarily be limited to multiple choice items. We anticipate that the assessment would be undertaken at some time between the end of the sophomore year and graduation, but no particular preference is indicated for the precise point of assessment. The State Higher Education Executive Officers see general education as vital to the collegiate experience and single it out for outcomes assessment from other elements of the curriculum. Before any curricular changes are planned in response to this assessment (particularly when comparative data are used), an institution should recognize the possible effects of differing student motivation in taking tests unrelated to course requirements and of any instruction directed exclusively at the test items themselves.

Recommendation 4. The performance of students on licensure and certification examinations should be used as an appropriate measure for judging program and institutional quality. Institutional performance should be publicized.

Comment: We have in mind such undergraduate fields as teaching, engineering, nursing and various areas of allied health. Law and medicine represent fields beyond the baccalaureate degree, and pharmacy may fall within or beyond the baccalaureate level. If an institution offers academic programs designed to lead to licensure or certification and graduating students then have difficulty entering the profession, these programs need careful attention. While private institutions often operate independently of state higher education, we believe this is an area where the performance of all institutions should be a matter of public interest. The identification of licensed and certified fields in this recommendation should not discourage institutions from assessing programs in other fields with such instruments as the subject area tests of the Graduate Record Examination, recognizing both the differing levels of participation in testing by students and the differing compatibility between tests and program objectives.

Recommendation 5. Predominantly occupational programs at both two-year and four-year institutions should be judged, in part, by the success of students in finding employment appropriate to their degree. The success of transfer students at community colleges in gaining admission to and completing programs at four-year institutions should also be measured and evaluated.

Comment: In measuring job placement and transfer rates, consistent definitions should be used. In particular, care should be taken to account for students entering the Armed Services, as well as those who undertake further education or already have jobs in their field of study.

Recommendation 6. States should establish a system of periodic reports to high schools on the aggregate performance of each high school's graduates in basic skills tests, progress toward a degree and possibly other indicators of academic success. Such reports should be made available to the public.

Comment: We believe this recommendation is essential to the proper linkage between K-12 and higher education. High schools need data on the performance of their graduates in college to pinpoint where improvement should be made. The public also needs to know how well their schools are doing. If properly implemented with the active involvement of state boards of education, this recommendation should encourage constructive discussions between high schools and colleges.

Recommendation 7. Institutions should periodically assess the satisfaction of alumni with their higher education experience.

Comment: Surveys of alumni can provide useful information for a campus in comparison with other institutions and can identify areas of weakness. However, results of surveys should not be compared among campuses, without taking into account the differences in perceptions that may result from differing student bodies and from differing points of assessment beyond graduation.

Recommendation 8. States should recognize the costs of assessment and follow-up, especially in the activities cited in Recommendations 1 and 3, and should incorporate these costs in the funding of higher education.

Comment: While some may argue that the costs of assessment and follow-up should be borne totally through internal reallocation, such costs are often significant in comparison with the budget of institutions. The staffs of governing boards and coordinating boards have frequently been funded without sufficient resources for statewide assessment. The instruments for assessment are costly, whether purchased from a testing firm or developed internally, and the analyses, if done properly, will add no small financial burden. Just the cost of a general education instrument can run close to 1% of an institution's total budget. While these costs require reckoning, consider the willingness of society to pay for quality control in other spheres of activity. Regular follow-up on the implementation of corrective measures is particularly important.

Recommendation 9. States should provide some financial incentive for higher quality instructional programs.

Comment: Though the call for incentive funding may raise concerns, especially in states faced with fiscal constraints, we nonetheless believe such funding is needed to reaffirm the central role of instruction on our campuses. We do not want to specify the weight incentive funding should have in comparison with traditionally based funding (which often relates to capitation-driven formulas), but the weight need not be large. In fact, the growing practice, cited earlier, of state-sponsored demonstration projects suggests an attractive starting point. Improvements in quality, as well as in the absolute levels of quality, should be eligible for incentives.

Recommendation 10. Accreditation agencies should use the results of institutional assessment, including assessment of student outcomes as set forth in Recommendations 1-5, in the accreditation process.

Comment: In the case of specialized accreditation agencies in licensed and certified fields, such agencies should set out minimum standards for performance as part of their review. Regional accreditation agencies should work with institutions to set individual benchmarks for outcomes in Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 5.

In summary, the State Higher Education Executive Officers present 10 recommendations on outcomes assessment primarily for undergraduate education. We see outcomes assessment as a vital companion to other important forms of assessment, such as external peer review, that need not lead to quantifiable results. The State Higher Education Executive Officers ask each state to adopt the recommendations in a way that best meets its needs.

"The public has the right to know what it is getting for its expenditure of tax resources; the public has a right to know and understand the quality of undergraduate education that young people receive from publicly funded colleges and universities. They have a right to know that their resources are being wisely invested and committed."

John Ashcroft
Governor of Missouri

CHAIRMAN

John Ashcroft
Governor of Missouri

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DEFINING THE ISSUES

The American system of higher education is an essential component of this nation's continuing economic development, cultural vitality, and general prosperity. By combining the finest research programs with the greatest variety of educational courses and degrees available anywhere, postsecondary institutions provide graduates, and therefore communities, with unparalleled opportunities for personal and professional advancement. Today the percentage of Americans taking advantage of these opportunities for learning is unmatched by any other country in the world. More than 60 percent of this country's high school graduates continue their studies beyond high school.

While student enrollment has tripled since 1965, postsecondary institutions have virtually doubled expenditures to a total of $90 billion in 1984. Both the public and private sectors recognize the critical role of colleges and universities. Funding from local, state, and federal governments account for nearly half of all postsecondary expenditures (Carnes). The private sector provides substantial and steadily increasing support. In 1985 corporations and foundations contributed more than $5 billion to colleges and universities.

But despite obvious successes and generous funding, recent reports have criticized the effectiveness of higher education (Association of American Colleges; National Commission on Excellence in Education; National Commission on Higher Education Issues; National Endowment for the Humanities; National Institute of Education). Both objective data and subjective assessments of higher education indicate disturbing trends. Today's graduates are not as well educated as students of past decades. Gaps between ideal academic standards and actual student learning are widening. Evidence of program decline and devaluation, particularly in the humanities, is becoming increasingly prevalent.

Not enough is known about the skills and knowledge of the average college graduate. However, there is a disturbing trend in the test scores of students graduating from colleges and entering graduate schools. Student performance declined in eleven of fifteen major subject area tests of the Graduate Record Examinations between 1964 and 1982 (Adelman).

College students' attitudes toward their education indicate room for improvement. A 1984 national survey of 5,000 students found that 40 percent of students said no professor took a special interest in their personal academic life and 42 percent felt that most students are treated like numbers in a book (Jacobson).

Other indicators of the deficiencies of higher education come from the employers of graduates. Preliminary screening of ROTC cadets indicates that many cannot pass a basic academic skills test (Tice). These college students are listed as "provisional cadets" until they meet basic quality standards.

Other businesses and professions voice similar frustrations about higher education graduates' readiness for employment. The ever-growing trend of testing elementary and high school teachers has shown that the baccalaureate degree is not a guarantee of even basic literacy, let alone competence, in the teacher's subject matter areas. Surveys also indicate substantial levels of dissatisfaction among business employers with the work preparation role of colleges and universities. More than 10 percent of companies surveyed in 1977 provided remedial education, even for college graduates, who tended to be weak in communication and interpersonal skills (Lusterman).

The problems in higher education have been documented by national reports and by key leaders from business, the military, and education itself. Despite this documentation, higher education accrediting agencies apparently are unable to address the decline in academic standards and to hold member institutions accountable for their students' performance. This is especially surprising in light of existing accreditation standards that require a component that considers "outcomes." In practice, however, accrediting associations have focused on campus resources, such as the number of volumes in the library, student/faculty ratio, and structural facilities and physical resources, rather than student learning and abilities. However, even accreditation programs are beginning to note that student progress needs to be substantiated. For example, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has adopted standards for accreditation that include an assessment component.

Improving undergraduate education in the United States will require a coordinated effort by state policymakers, institutional governing boards, administrators, and faculty across all the components of a college education—teaching, academic resources, support services, and curriculum. For schools that offer undergraduate instruction, discussions about the kinds of students the institutions want to develop will naturally lead to decisions to refocus attention and redirect resources to improve undergraduate teaching and learning. Discussions about various approaches to assessment, and specific techniques of assessment, will be a natural follow-up to decisions to improve undergraduate teaching and learning.

As the primary source of funds for public higher education, the states have a major stake in the quality of postsecondary institutions that goes beyond measures of input and processes. State attention must be directed to the outcomes of the higher education system—namely, measuring how much students learn in college.

Assessment is a way that faculty, institutions, and institutional sponsors can focus on outcomes of students, programs, and institutions. Quality can be better determined when information about students, programs, and an institution is regularly collected, analyzed, and used to improve teaching and learning.

Assessment of undergraduate learning and college quality needs, at minimum, to include data about student skills, abilities, and cognitive learning; substantive knowledge of individual students and groups of students at various points in their undergraduate careers; instructional approaches used by faculty; and educational curricula. Because the nature of undergraduate education requires many important skills and cognitive abilities be acquired and developed, colleges and universities should use a number of assessment approaches and techniques.

In 1985, the Southern Regional Education Board stated in its critical report "Access to Quality Undergraduate Education" that quality and access are intertwined. Access is meaningless without considering the quality of the undergraduate program. Yet, there is a fear that assessment procedures will adversely affect students who are underprepared. It is well documented that many of these students perform less well on standardized achievement tests. An assessment program that uses multiple measures of student learning will more accurately and fairly depict a student's knowledge and abilities, regardless of background or status. Instead of limiting education access, assessment may actually provide incentives to ensure that underprepared students receive the proper counseling, placement, and academic assistance needed to perform in college and to graduate in a reasonable amount of time.

Assessment practices are now in place in a number of states and institutions of higher education. Some of the programs were begun by institutions at their own initiative, while others have been launched as a result of state incentives or mandates. Although our emphasis is on public institutions, we realize there is much to learn from private colleges and universities.

Alverno College, a small, private, liberal arts school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, offers a model of student assessment. The Alverno faculty conducted a review of curriculum in 1971 and sought a performance-based assessment process. The faculty, lacking higher education models, turned to the corporate community for model programs.

In the Alverno model, the fundamental principles of assessment are specifying criteria; relying on multiple judgments; choosing from alternate performance modes to elicit the full range of the developing ability; and using expert judgment to infer student abilities from this performance. Students also participate in self-assessment. Alverno relies heavily on volunteer assessors from the Milwaukee business and professional community to evaluate student performance. These outside assessors are trained by the Alverno faculty. Their work supplements assessments conducted by the faculty and by the Alverno Assessment Center. The Alverno Office of Research and Evaluation conducts ongoing studies of curriculum in light of assessment data. The major areas of research are what enhances learning, what makes it last, how it is best assessed, how it relates to personal growth, and how it contributes to professional effectiveness.

Northeast Missouri State University (NMSU) adopted a program to assess student learning, often referred to as value-added assessment, in the early 1970s. Scores on tests administered to entering college freshmen are compared with identical tests given to the same students as second semester sophomores to measure gains from the college experience. In addition to the value-added testing, all seniors are required to take a comprehensive exam in their major field of study. Many seniors take standardized exams, and faculty develop examinations for majors that do not have nationally normed tests. Demographic data, and surveys that evaluate the attitudes of students, faculty, alumni, and employers round out information gathered to show the value of an NMSU education.

Northeast Missouri State University's approach to assessment is being adopted by other colleges and universities and is being considered by state legislatures and higher education coordinating boards. The South Dakota Board of Regents has adopted a similar approach for all state colleges and universities in the system. Kean College of New Jersey and the State University of New York, Plattsburgh, are among postsecondary institutions that are developing variations of the value-added program.

States are beginning to address the issues of college quality and assessment either singly or in combination with comprehensive reform efforts. The Arkansas Board of Higher Education has asked individual institutions to review, modify, and implement campus assessment plans and report to the board on the specific assessment program initiated on campus. The Louisiana Board of Regents recently examined the core curricula of state institutions in a general education review. The regents have asked state public colleges and universities to assess the outcomes of the newly revamped general education curriculum. However, the decision on the type and form of testing is left to the individual institution. In Illinois, the Committee on the Study of Undergraduate Education of the Board of Higher Education is recommending student assessment programs be instituted to provide information on student performance, but will not mandate the details of the assessment package.

New Jersey has a comprehensive system of entry-level testing in place for incoming college students. An advisory commission has been established to design and implement a long-range College Outcomes Evaluation Project, including student development, research, scholarship, and contributions to community and society. An instrument to test for these student outcomes is planned for development by 1988. A working group appointed by the Maryland State Board for Higher Education has recommended that a general education proficiency test be developed and administered to a sample of students in all statewide public postsecondary institutions at the end of the sophomore year. The Virginia State Council of Higher Education has reviewed existing assessment practices at Virginia postsecondary institutions. While recommending against statewide minimum competency testing for Virginia postsecondary students, all state institutions of higher education have been asked to establish campus-designed procedures for measuring student achievement.

The Colorado higher education reorganization plan requires each state university and college to measure student achievement. Each institution may adopt its own assessment system, depending on its mission. Schools that do not comply by 1990 will lose 20 percent of their state funding appropriation. The Utah Board of Regents is now revising and updating the Master Plan for Higher Education in Utah. Assessment of student outcomes is being considered as part of the revision. Currently, postsecondary institutions are strongly encouraged by the regents to be more active in assessing student learning.

Florida and Tennessee have implemented comprehensive statewide assessment efforts. Florida uses a state-mandated examination to assess basic skills. Students are tested at college entry for placement and remediation, and a standardized exit examination is given to all students before graduation from a Florida community college or entry into upper division courses at state four-year colleges and universities. Students who receive state aid and attend private colleges and universities in Florida must also participate in this testing program.

Tennessee's assessment program uses an incentive funding approach. Five percent of each public institution's budget is allocated on the basis of how well the college or university meets five performance criteria, including the assessment of student learning.

Other states have initiated variations of performance funding programs. Missouri rewards individual institutional improvement based on areas of critical state need. New York has an institutional incentive grant program based on the number of degrees conferred. Massachusetts provides funds for Centers of Excellence. Ohio has adopted five specific grant programs to improve higher education, including funding Centers for Excellence and chaired professorships. While these programs are not based specifically on student outcomes, they provide incentives for institutitional improvement. New Jersey also provides special funding to institutions; the Governor's Challenge Funds target state institutions that demonstrate dramatic improvement. South Dakota has begun a performance funding program, and Florida has adopted an initiative to fund Indicators of Progress toward Excellence in Education. The Virginia Fund for Excellence provides grants for institutionally generated, goal-oriented projects.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE IN 1991?

America's institutions of higher education stand as a gateway to opportunity, enterprise, and individual growth. Substantial public and private funds support these institutions. Public policymakers, taxpayers, students, and parents should expect colleges and universities to fulfill their promises. To assure accountability, postsecondary institutions must assess student learning and ability, program effectiveness, and institutional accomplishment of mission.

Although assessment is an area in which only a few institutions of higher education have had long experience, it is an area in which colleges and universities should invest significant time and resources. And colleges and universities are beginning to realize the value of this investment. A 1986 survey by the American Council on Education showed that 91 percent of college and university administrators supported assessment that is linked to improvement of education. Each campus should assess whether the receipt of a baccalaureate degree signifies the acquisition of a core of knowledge, along with the development of abilities to use that knowledge effectively.

Assessment of students' skill levels can and should occur as early as possible in the college program. Results should be used for placement and remediation. The acquisition of knowledge, and the development of abilities, such as thinking critically, solving problems, and synthesizing and drawing inferences from data, are important parts of undergraduate student learning. As students progress in their studies, they should be gaining knowledge and developing higher levels of these fundamental abilities.

Assessment and college quality are not incompatible with the research and graduate functions of postsecondary institutions. In fact, a renewed emphasis on quality at the undergraduate level can revitalize the research and graduate missions of colleges and universities. Quality institutions will aid the pursuit of research and the creation and application of new knowledge. And better undergraduate students will be better graduate students and professionals.

The benefits of assessment will extend beyond the campus. Graduates of quality institutions will be better prepared to enter the workforce. Assuring the integrity of the college product will enhance the contributions of colleges and universities to the social and cultural development of their communities. And it will promote the link between postsecondary institutions and elementary and secondary schools. A more rigorous undergraduate program will require high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools to do a better job of preparing students to perform college level work.

GOVERNORS' ACTION AGENDA

1. Governors, state legislatures, state coordinating boards, and institutional governing boards should clearly define the role and mission of each public higher education institution in their states. Governors also should encourage the governing boards of each independent college to clearly define their missions.

By setting goals and objectives, colleges and universities define their particular institutional purposes and develop standards by which to evaluate their progress in achieving those missions. Most colleges and universities will have more than a single function within their mission. Undergraduate instruction may join graduate instruction, research, and public service—or some combination—as a basic function of institutional mission. Institutions should be rewarded fiscally and otherwise as they that take the time to refocus attention on their missions and take steps to evaluate how well goals and objectives central to clearly focused missions are being met. Similarly, independent institutions will be more effective in the competitive arena of higher education as they too refocus attention on roles and missions.

To support these efforts, there are a number of state policy alternatives that can be considered.

- Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should examine the legal and historical basis for the mission of each public college and university in light of current and future state needs.
- Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should determine if state needs are being met by the current configuration of missions among public higher education institutions.
- Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should define, redefine, or refocus the missions of each institution in order to provide a high quality education through a cost-effective delivery system.
- Governors should encourage coordinating boards to review the full range of academic programs in public colleges and universities in light of both institutional mission and program quality.

2. Governors, state legislatures, coordinating boards, governing boards, administrators, and faculties should re-emphasize—especially in universities that give high priority to research and graduate instruction—the fundamental importance of undergraduate instruction.

The predominant model to which most colleges and universities currently aspire is that of the research university. Current reward structures for promotion and tenure in American higher education often encourage faculty to concentrate their efforts on research-oriented tasks. This can lead to a loss of institutional enthusiasm for undergraduate instruction.

Institutions, and the faculty who teach in them, must have the strong encouragement of Governors, legislatures, and coordinating boards to hold undergraduate instruction in special trust and give it special attention.

The task force of Governors fully recognize the synergism that exists among the functions of teaching, research, and public service. Further, the Governors understand that undergraduate students benefit from the enrichment and example of faculty engaged in research and service activities.

There are several ways in which this can be furthered. Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should encourage public discussions of the nature of undergraduate education on each college and university campus, public and private, two-year, and four-year.

Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards also are encouraged to develop funding incentives for institutions that reward quality undergraduate teaching and student learning.

3. Each college and university should implement systematic programs that use multiple measures to assess undergraduate student learning. The information gained from assessment should be used to evaluate institutional and program quality. Information about institutional and program quality also should be made available to the public.

Colleges and universities can no longer take for granted the learning that should be occurring on their campuses. In most instances, systematic student assessment, including tough-minded grading, will document the learning that has been taking place. In other instances, a student assessment program will indicate areas in which curriculum and instruction need to be improved. In all instances, regular assessment will provide public institutions with the information they need to document to Governors, coordinating boards, parents, students, and legislatures that tax dollars and other resources are being invested wisely. In a similar vein, independent institutions will be able to demonstrate to their constituencies that the support provided is making a vital difference in the lives of students.

To achieve these goals, Governors should call on colleges and universities to implement programs of undergraduate student assessment that are appropriate to the particular missions of those institutions.

In addition, state coordinating boards, governing boards, and college and university faculties should use the results of assessment programs to improve teaching and learning at each institution.

4. Governors, state legislatures, and statewide coordinating boards should adjust funding formulas for public colleges and universities to provide incentives for improving undergraduate student learning, based upon the results of comprehensive assessment programs. Independent colleges and universities should be encouraged to do likewise.

Although there is justification for allocating resources to public colleges and universities based on enrollment, mission, and other factors, there is also a clear need to reward institutions that can demonstrate that they are doing a good job of educating students. Institutions should be encouraged and rewarded in their efforts to increase the learning of those in their charge. Incentive funding will send a clear signal that policymakers expect and demand proven quality in higher education.

Governors should work with legislatures and coordinating boards to implement a reasonable and substantial incentive funding component in the regular funding formulas for higher education. These same state bodies should recommend special financial incentives—apart from and in addition to the regular funding formula—for public colleges and universities to implement programs of undergraduate student assessment.

Governors should also work with legislatures and coordinating boards to develop funding mechanisms to address deficiencies in student preparation to perform college work, which are identified through assessment programs.

5. Governors, state legislatures, coordinating boards, and governing boards should reaffirm their strong commitment to access to public higher education for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

It is incorrectly assumed that quality and access are competing, antagonistic values in higher education. Although declines in the quality of higher education in the last two decades have occurred during a period when access has been expanded, it is not true that access causes a decline in the quality of higher education.

However, access without quality is a cruel deception, while quality without access is a betrayal of the cherished American ideal of equal opportunity and the belief that it is important to educate all children. In the next decade, an increasing proportion of the nation's youth in the traditional college attendance age categories will have backgrounds that have provided fewer economic and educational advantages. From moral, economic, and national security perspectives the nation simply cannot afford to sacrifice the next generation of emerging Americans in the name of quality enhancement.

College faculties and presidents, governing boards, and state coordinating boards are encouraged to define the prerequisites for success in higher education, including model college preparatory curricula, and to ensure that all parents, students, and school officials are well informed of them.

Institutions, governing boards, and state coordinating boards are encouraged to undertake studies of the patterns of success of the students at each public institution to determine if systematic variations occur among the graduates of particular school districts. The results of these studies should be shared with local school boards so corrective action can be taken as necessary.

6. The higher education accrediting community should require colleges and universities to collect and utilize information about undergraduate student outcomes. Demonstrated levels of student learning and performance should be a consideration in granting institutional accreditation.

Although regional accrediting agencies claim to require an outcomes component in their standards, traditionally they have emphasized the availability of institutional resources and processes (education inputs) when deciding to grant accreditation. These resources certainly are fundamental to accomplishing institutional missions; however, they do not by themselves guarantee a high quality, competitive education. Ultimately, institutions must be judged on whether they have, in fact, produced graduates who are intellectually prepared for life and work. For public or private institutions that have undergraduate instruction as one of their functions, programs of student assessment will help demonstrate that students are learning and that the resources and processes are serving the needs of states and the nation.

Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should inform accrediting associations of their expectations that student outcomes be a component in the accreditation of every college and university.

Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should encourage accrediting agencies and public institutions to release detailed assessments of institutional strengths and weaknesses—including reviews of student performance. For purposes of consumer information, Governors, state legislatures, and coordinating boards should request this disclosure from accrediting agencies, and should require it of public institutions.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE SUCCEEDING?

To determine and monitor a state's progress in the area of undergraduate student outcomes, Governors can ask the following broad questions:

1. Does each higher education institution in the state have a clear statement of institutional mission?
2. At each institution of higher education in the state with a function of undergraduate instruction, what assessment practices are in place to evaluate student, program, and institutional performance?
3. What state incentives exist to encourage the assessment of undergraduate students, undergraduate programs, and institutions?
4. What information is reported regularly to the public concerning undergraduate student learning, undergraduate program quality, and undergraduate institutional quality?

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

The members of the task force realize that a great deal of work must be done in the area of assessing undergraduate education. In some cases, appropriate assessment instruments do not currently exist. Institutions may have to develop their own approaches and instruments—the experience of Alverno College is an example.

Assessment will vary at different institutions, because the mix of programs, missions, and types of students will differ. Each institution will have to determine what it wants to measure before deciding which assessment approaches and techniques are appropriate. The large vendors of standardized and customized tests will need time to design new instruments and approaches to assess higher order abilities.

The Governors on the task force are aware that assessment is currently undertaken by most colleges and universities. From the most basic assessments of student learning, such as grading course examinations and term papers, to sophisticated norm-referenced examinations, colleges and universities already collect information about undergraduate student learning. However, this information is seldom collected systematically or analyzed comprehensively. Such information could be regularly collected and interpreted, supplemented with additional student outcomes information, and used to improve undergraduate teaching and learning.

Implementing a comprehensive undergraduate assessment program will involve certain costs. These costs will vary according to the size of the institution, the nature of the assessment program selected, and the outcomes desired. Peter T. Ewell and Dennis P. Jones in "The Costs of Assessment" state that the question of the cost of assessment is one of how much additional money must be spent to begin a program appropriate to the needs of the institution. Given that dollars currently spent for assessment often can be spent more effectively, and that assessment programs can become more efficiently operated over time, many estimates of new dollars required for implemented comprehensive programs can be substantially reduced.

State leaders can expect opposition from faculty and administrators who fear unintended side effects from the assessment process, such as teaching to the test, limiting the access of the educationally disadvantaged to a college education, narrowing curriculum, and adversely affecting research activities. A 1986 survey by the American Council on Education found the following stumbling blocks to assessment: no funds to develop procedures (71 percent); not clear what to evaluate (64 percent); fears about misuse of results (60 percent); lack of faculty support (58 percent); and no good evaluation instruments (57 percent) (El-Khawas). Faculty and administrators must be an integral part of assessment efforts and be seated at the table at the beginning of the discussion. When faculty see the demonstrated benefits of assessment programs, as they have at such diverse schools as the University of Tennessee, Alverno College, and Northeast Missouri State University, they, too, will become standard bearers for achieving more effective college quality through assessment.

This report emphasizes that Governors can take a positive approach in encouraging assessment. The obstacles to assessment are more mythical than real. Peter Ewell states that "statewide approaches should as far as possible be designed to challenge excellence rather than to mandate adequacy. Experience has shown that higher-education institutions are at their best when pursuing the best."

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ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT

A VIEW FROM THE STATES

by Carol M. Boyer
Peter T. Ewell
Joni E. Finney
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As a matter of state-level concern, assessment is clearly in the wind. Encouraged by organizations such as the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Governors' Association, the states have taken up the call to assess student and institutional performance. But, how strong are the winds blowing? In what directions?

To get answers to these questions, we report here findings from a new, 50-state survey conducted by mail and phone this January and February. The survey was co-sponsored by ECS, the AAHE Assessment Forum, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). The SHEEO academic officers were the chief reporters on activity in their states.

Our findings, in brief, are these:

A year or two ago, only a handful of states had formal initiatives labeled "assessment." Now, two-thirds do. The variety of approaches is considerable.

A strong trend among state authorities is to consider the design and conduct of assessment a matter of institutional prerogative—a development many find reassuring.

One characteristic of American higher education that confuses so many outsiders and pleases insiders is its diversity. The same is true of state roles in higher education. Not only do their governance structures for public higher education differ, so too do their political "cultures." These cultures dramatically affect how the states respond to the issue of assessment.

In our survey, all but a few of the state boards indicated that they were playing important roles in assessment; two-thirds could point to explicit statewide assessment programs planned or already in place. Even among those states without programs labeled "statewide assessment," a majority reported (with approval) on some assessment activity at the campus level.

Different Definitions, Different Roles

It is apparent from our survey, however, that the states are not about to be constrained by narrow definitions. "Yes, we are doing assessment," several said, "but it may not be what you think it is." Survey respondents described statewide programs for assessing the skills of college freshmen, sophomores, seniors, and even high school students thinking about college; they also described new initiatives to strengthen program and institutional reviews by incorporating outcome measures, new statewide retention studies, and new follow-up surveys of college graduates.

Our survey also revealed a basic change in attitude about the role of state boards, one that would not have been found even a few years ago. Governors and legislators have placed the quality of undergraduate education and student learning squarely on the state agenda. The state boards aim to keep it there.

Before discussing the many new programs being developed in the name of assessment, let's examine the different attitudes expressed about the proper state role in this sensitive arena.

One such difference across the states is the extent to which they consider assessment and outcomes measurement to be a distinct policy area. Some states can and do point to explicit and identifiable testing programs; leading the list are states with established programs, including Florida, Georgia, South Dakota, and Tennessee. The group also includes states like Texas with a testing initiative currently on the table, New Jersey with a 10-year history of basic-skills testing and a new outcomes assessment program under development, and Colorado and California with explicit legislative mandates to address the issue.

Other states, however, resist treating assessment separately; they consider it more appropriate to conduct assessment within a broader framework of existing policy mechanisms, such as statewide master planning, mission approval, or program review. Ohio's response is typical of this group, which also includes Illinois, Connecticut, and Rhode Island: "We are not focused on assessment per se, but are dedicated to improving the quality of higher education in Ohio. To get a qualitative improvement, we will naturally get an assessment by-product." By identifying actions such as new admissions standards and studies of retention and student transfer as "assessment initiatives," additional states reveal that they are *de facto* members of this group. Among them are Arkansas, North Carolina, Alaska, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.

Regardless of the extent to which state boards define assessment as a distinct policy area, understanding *how* states define their particular roles in assessment is fundamental. Furthermore, in describing state initiatives nationwide, it is critical to avoid mental "score-keeping" on the issue. Indeed, in many cases, states that reported "no explicit assessment programs" were in fact doing as much about assessment as other states with explicit programs. In terms of particular state roles, the survey revealed three basic levels of involvement.

Roughly one third of the state boards surveyed see their role as minimal—either because their statutory authority is limited or because their current ability to initiate policy is constrained by fiscal conditions or a need to devote attention to other, more pressing matters. In describing their roles, state boards in this category often use terms like "coordinating" or "monitoring" what individual institutions or systems of institutions undertake on their own in the name of assessment. At most, state boards in this category periodically compile data on assessment and outcomes measurement as part of their traditional reporting function to the legislature and the public.

Slightly more than half the respondents see the paramount role of their state board as one of actively encouraging, promoting, or facilitating institutional initiatives in assessment and outcomes measurement. Phrases like "provide leadership," "serve as a catalyst," "raise public awareness or consciousness," "provide incentives," and "develop guidelines" were common here. Among the specific roles noted by respondents in this category were: (1) requiring institutions explicitly to address assessment and related issues by mandating submission of local assessment plans or by including assessment in regular statewide reviews of programs, missions, or master plans; (2) convening statewide conferences or seminars to explore alternative approaches or share information about emerging initiatives; (3) providing direct financial incentives, such as challenge grants or categorical grants, to support pilot or "demonstration" projects in one or more institutions; (4) providing technical assistance in the form of referrals and statewide study groups on particular

approaches to assessment; and (5) taking the lead in developing multi-institutional assessment initiatives in areas of statewide priority or on topics beyond the purview of individual institutions—for example, teacher education or "early assessment" of high school students.

States in this middle category were also highly conscious of their role as "mediator" between the institutions and the legislature. For example, Missouri's role was described as "... encouraging, facilitating, even coercing institutions to address the issue in a timely and appropriate manner, and encouraging others [including the legislature] to give institutions the opportunity to do it right."

A final group of about ten state boards defines their role as actively designing and implementing assessment programs. About half of these are states with testing programs of some kind already in place; the other half anticipate implementation of such programs. In either case, the state role involves both choosing common statewide assessment instruments and setting performance criteria (i.e., cut-off scores) for the instruments used. A few of these state boards assume an additional, independent role in assessing *system*-level outcomes—that is, the documented contribution of the state's entire system of higher education toward the attainment of state goals for undergraduate education. Among such goals are promoting access, economic development, and functional literacy across the state's entire population.

Regardless of their level of advocacy or involvement, state boards legitimize their particular roles in traditional accountability terms. Most feel that their charters require them to insure quality throughout the state's system of higher education; most also feel they have a primary role in providing continuing evidence to both the legislature and the public on various "indicators of effectiveness" for the state's system of higher education.

Finally, most state boards recognize that assessment is ultimately a campus responsibility. Only secondarily and with reluctance do state boards actively intervene in what they see as domains of appropriate institutional responsibility or campus autonomy. Typical of many responses was that of Kansas: "Only if they *don't* do it will there be more push from the Board."

A Mosaic of State Initiatives

Our survey afforded state boards an opportunity to describe in detail what they are doing in the name of assessment. Here are the highlights.

Mandated statewide testing programs. Although this is a popular image of statewide assessment, relatively few *new* initiatives of this kind were reported. Established programs such as Florida's CLASP, Georgia's Regents Examination, and South Dakota's Higher Education Assessment Program continue with no basic changes in their structure or content anticipated. Most of the newer statewide programs, on the other hand, are explicitly avoiding the "rising junior" or "value-added" approaches typified by these early entrants. (Six states recently considered a testing-based "rising junior" option and rejected it.) Instead, they are following a path similar to that of New Jersey in mandating basic skills assessment for entering freshmen. Texas currently is weighing a proposal to test all entering freshmen for basic skills in reading, writing, and computation; similar programs have evolved on a voluntary basis in Wisconsin, California, and several other states. (A related step in some states is to establish minimum admissions standards for public institutions on the basis of exams such as the SAT and ACT.)

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Testing for teacher education. Teacher education continues to emerge as a distinct area of statewide concern and action. Although survey respondents were not asked specifically about this area, nine states reported testing initiatives in place for teacher education; another three are currently pilot-testing such programs. Most initiatives in this area focus on tests of basic skills as a condition for college admission; several, however, are "rising junior" examinations—students who do not pass are blocked from admission to teacher education programs or limited in their ability to register for specific courses. The majority use commercially available standardized tests, the most prominent being the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) from the Educational Testing Service. Some states use locally designed instruments to test basic skills in reading, writing, and computation. At least one uses the ACT-COMP (an instrument intended for assessment of general education). In all cases, state-mandated testing initiatives in teacher education are a direct response to public concerns about the quality of the elementary and secondary teaching force; most have their origins in legislative action or pressure.

Early intervention programs. Among the most innovative of reported programs in assessment are a handful that seek to identify students' deficiencies in basic skills prior to college admission—indeed, as early as junior high or middle school. Based on the premise that failure in college is due largely to inadequate preparation, these "early assessment" programs attempt to work in partnership with state boards of education and local school districts. With students' deficiencies assessed and addressed early, the hope is that quality will "trickle up" to the college level. Noteworthy examples include Ohio's Early Assessment of High School Students Program and Indiana's pilot College Placement and Assessment Center, both of which have received substantial funding from their respective legislatures. Programs in Michigan and Texas have some similar characteristics.

In Ohio, instruments developed at Ohio State and Youngstown State are administered to high school juniors in the areas of mathematics and writing (using holistic scoring techniques) for early intervention and remediation. Indiana's pilot program reaches back even farther, to students in the 8th or 9th grade. Using mass marketing techniques, assessment results are provided to parents, made available to high school counselors, and maintained in a computerized data bank that tracks student progress up to and into college.

Two other types of state action are representative of a trend toward early intervention. Several state higher education boards are currently working with state departments of education to develop a common statewide college preparatory curriculum for public high schools. And at least five states provide "feedback reports" to individual high schools on the subsequent performance of their graduates in college.

Encouraging institutional action. By far, the majority of state approaches to assessment emphasize the responsibility of individual institutions for developing local assessment plans. Connecticut's response is typical: "The role of the Department is to stimulate activity and change; the institutional role is to devise and carry out the assessment process."

Approximately 15 states have taken this approach; they've asked institutions to develop explicit assessment plans and to report to their state board on these plans (and, in some cases, the results of such assessment as well). Most such programs are just getting underway, but a few are on a tight schedule; institutional plans in Missouri are to be developed this year, and in four other states they are expected by the end of the 1987-88 academic year. In at least one case, the consequences of failure to comply are also clear; the Colorado Commission on Higher Education is authorized by statute to withhold up to two percent of an institution's base appropriation. In all these states, however, individual institutions are being given considerable latitude to develop approaches that reflect distinct institutional missions. As noted earlier, some state boards are helping the development process by supporting statewide conferences on assessment and related issues (over 20 such conferences were reported by survey respondents), by providing technical assistance, and by establishing various incentive grant programs. Other states, with special legislative appropriations, are establishing pilot or "demonstration" projects in one or more institutions. Examples here include Kean College in New Jersey, James Madison University in Virginia, Colorado State University, Ball State University in Indiana, SUNY at Plattsburgh, and Western Washington University.

Assessment within existing statewide mechanisms. A variety of state actions often overlap the previous category by incorporating assessment or outcomes measurement into existing statewide planning, quality control, or accountability mechanisms such as master planning, mission approval, or program review.

In Alabama, Kansas, Rhode Island, and Arizona, for example, institutions are required to report initiatives in assessment and outcomes measurement as part of ongoing quality reporting or institutional planning/budgeting cycles. In Nevada and Colorado, the assessment plans of individual institutions are examined in light of established mission-review powers of the state board. In Illinois, Kentucky, and other states, existing statewide program-review criteria are

being modified to encompass the assessment of outcomes produced by particular programs. Furthermore, Illinois' program review process is being extended to cover general education as well as recognized degree programs.

Statewide monitoring of other outcomes. In addition to the approaches just described, a growing number of states have initiatives planned or in place to monitor other outcomes such as student retention, satisfaction and job placement of college graduates, and economic and community development. Two noteworthy efforts are underway in Maryland and North Carolina.

Maryland monitors retention and completion rates of first-time, full-time freshmen in its two- and four-year public institutions, and conducts follow-up surveys of bachelor's degree recipients and their employers. Follow-up surveys examine students' attendance patterns and residence during college, financial aid, post-graduation educational activities and plans, employment and occupational status, and overall evaluation of campus and program. A survey of employers examines hiring patterns, attractiveness of certain educational backgrounds for entry-level positions, on-the-job performance of certain attributes and skills, overall job performance, and so on.

North Carolina has been monitoring the performance of transfer students throughout its institutions since 1969. The state board also monitors retention and completion rates of various student cohorts, including first-time freshmen and transfer students, and conducts follow-up surveys of college graduates every five years to learn about employment trends and student satisfaction with the college experience.

A Look Ahead

We asked survey respondents about the concerns voiced in their states about assessment. Many of those concerns have been heard before, namely, that assessment is a "technology" that cannot fully reflect the many-faceted products of a college experience; that assessment will be limited to basic skills testing and will not embrace critical thinking and other higher-order abilities associated with undergraduate education; that the process is burdensome and costly and may detract from already scarce instructional funds; that state-mandated assessment programs could become simply another energy-diverting, bureaucratic reporting mechanism; and that results will be used to cut funding or discontinue programs.

In the words of one state academic officer, "Legislators see a test as a concrete solution. They can put their arms around it and feel it, just like a new building. But the problems of improving undergraduate education are far more complex."

If our survey results accurately reflect what the states are doing in the name of assessment, then statewide testing is neither the evil empire its opponents fear nor the panacea its proponents often claim. Even where state boards and legislatures have dictated statewide solutions, implementation procedures have been developed in close consultation with the institutions involved. On the positive side, increased accountability has brought increased state support for centers of excellence and other quality improvements; campus leaders have found leverage for bringing about internal reforms; and new emphasis is being put on remediation and high school preparation for college. On the negative side, states that do have assessment programs admit that they greatly underestimated the costs—especially in staff time—of such programs. More importantly, as one respondent noted, "To assess is not necessarily to improve. We still have a long way to go."

What does the future hold with respect to statewide assessment and outcomes measurement? When asked whether their state's interest in assessment would increase, decrease, or stay the same in the coming year or two, more than three-fourths of those who offered an opinion felt that such interest would increase. More than a third of the states anticipate some further action with respect to basic skills testing of entering freshmen, assessment of general education outcomes, and tests of critical thinking and other higher order skills. More than a fourth expect further developments in areas such as "early assessment" programs designed to assess the readiness of high school students for college work, attitude surveys of entering freshmen, and follow-up studies of college graduates.

In most cases, however, survey respondents indicated that responsibility for designing and carrying out assessment and outcomes measurement should and will rest with the institutions themselves. Only a minority of the survey respondents felt that additional legislative action on assessment is likely in the coming year or two, though all agreed that legislative actions are difficult to predict. In any event, legislative "good behavior" in this regard is dependent upon institutional action. As one respondent put it, "If the institutions don't respond [to state proposed initiatives on general education], we'll come in and measure it."

The challenge for the future, then, will continue to be the good faith with which faculty and institutional leaders respond to the many statewide and local initiatives already in place. ■

More detailed survey findings and individual profiles for all 50 states will appear in a forthcoming ECS publication. For more information, write: Carol M. Boyer, Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, CO 80295.